

RECKLESS RALPH'S

DIME NOVEL ROUND-UP

A monthly magazine devoted to the collecting, preservation and literature of the old-time dime and nickel novels, libraries and popular story papers.

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April 1945

No. 151

IN MEMORIAM

WILLIAM JAMES BENNERS, Jr.

WHO DIED APRIL 3rd, 1940

This is a bit of poetry Uncle Billie
loved to read before he died.

God Bless Him

THERE IS A DAY

(To William James Benners)

There is a day that holds for me
The sweetest thoughts of memory—
A day when asters star the sod,
Companioned by the goldenrod—
The pomp of purple and of gold,
Which Autumns shuttle, fold on fold,
Weaves into splendid tapestries,
That fringe the ways and drape the
trees.

Upon your rosary of years
A golden bead again appears,
Out-shining beauty of the rest,
Reflecting all that's loveliest
In friendship's kingdom, far and near,
Of faithfulness and joy sincere,
And bringing gladness and content,
With which good will and peace are
blent.

There is a day that marks the birth
Of one true friend upon the earth,
When from remembrance wishes start,
And fill and overflow the heart
In brimming streams of happiness,
Whose fullness ever shall express
The sunshine wished the whole year
through,
When Happy Birthdays come to you.

Franklin Pierce Carrigan.

A DEFENSE OF THE DIME NOVEL

by Edward Hamlin

"Take that, and that!"

The words came from beneath a veil. A seemingly delicate arm was raised aloft and as quickly descended, and two men fell to the ground.

Thus began **Madam Lucie, the French Lady Detective**, a typical dime novel detective story from the famous **Old Sleuth Library**. As you can see, the author of this type of fiction wasted no time with elaborate descriptive introductions; he broke right into the plot with a breathless or unusual beginning. He had to; the sale of any paperback novel of the last century depended entirely upon the amount of interest which could be aroused by the cover situation and the opening paragraph, for during the height of their popularity there was a great variety of dime and half-dime papers from which the many sensation-seeking readers could choose.

The first dime novels were published in 1860 by Erastus Beadle, who advertised them as "dollar novels for a dime." Exciting reading material that the average reader could grasp was scarce, so Beadle's papers rose immediately to popularity. There subsequently appeared in competition with Beadle's **Dime Library** many other famous five cent and ten cent papers (all of which are classed as dime novels in my grandfather's catalogue), some of the most widely read of these being the following: **Nick Carter Library**, **Old Sleuth Library**, **Tip-Top Weekly**, **Old Cap Collier Library**, as well as many others. The Golden Age of the dime novel had begun.

The dime papers were intended for adults, and the nickel papers, originated later, were written for adventure-loving boys. "Nothing can be done about the depraved and degenerate adults who read the wicked stuff," contended a great many pious people, "but we certainly can prevent our children from reading it." Thus, without even troubling to read one of them, education authorities, clergymen, and parents somehow got the idea that dime novels were immoral. Many a grandfather and great-grandfather of today could probably tell you of sneaking off to the hayloft to satisfy his thirst for gripping literature, and how he had been caught several times by his strict

father, who had, as soon as possible, burned the precious stories in the stove. The unfair part of it all was that dime novels were no more immoral than **Uncle Tom's Cabin**. The heroes were all dashing young men who never swore, and who were always courteous to members of the opposite sex. The heroines were pure and fragile, as all young ladies should be, and were always true to their brave lovers. Even the villains, who in novel after novel carried off fainting damsels, treated their captives very politely when they reached the dark hiding place, and if any villain went so far as to say "Curse you," it was pretty strong language. As a matter of fact, rather than to have served as an immoral example for boys, the dime novel, through its honest, strong, brave, and just heroes, set an ideal that many a reader would like to have followed, if possible. These novels merely supplied clean and exciting reading for boys who could not afford to buy books like *Tom Sawyer*, which their parents would not give them because the Ladies' Aid Society had termed it mischievous.

The dime novel was considered by many people to be good for nothing except starting a fire in the kitchen stove. "Mere trash," they said, but they were wrong. The modern historian, by reading over these novels, can get an accurate idea of the period and the people, which can be got nowhere else. This is particularly true about the rip-roaring old West. Writers like Col. Prentiss Ingraham had spent a good deal of time in the West, and when they wrote about it they didn't touch it up as did most writers. They describe it as they had seen it, fitting the story to the West, and not the West to the story. Their descriptions and accounts of Indians were based on fact, and paint a vivid picture, found only in dime novels. Therefore, lying between the tattered and well-thumbed pages of old **Wild West** and **Buffalo Bill** papers, is perhaps the only true picture of what the West of Wild Bill Hickock was like.

The dime novel started a revolutionary movement in American literature, for it was the first to bring literature to the masses. After it had set the example, books were written more and more for all the people, and less and less for a select group of intellectuals. But like the fellow who cranked the Model "T" Ford in gear, the dime novel

had begun a revolution, only to be run over by it. Books as exciting as the best of the thrillers, and a good deal better written, were being published for adult and child alike. There was a book for every taste. A boy no longer had to sneak off to the barn to enjoy a good yarn; he had the most thrilling stories in his own bookcase. Therefore, with much better literature rising to take its place, the paper-back disappeared as quickly as it had come. The Golden Age of the dime novel was over.

The dime novel has disappeared from the American scene, but an inestimable number of collectors throughout the country still keep its memory alive. Let us, then, consider the value of the dime novel from another point of view. Paper-backs that sold for five or ten cents in 1870 are worth now, as collector's items, any price from one dollar to over a hundred dollars apiece, depending upon their rarity and condition. What is more, during the depression, when even stamps decreased in value, dime novels increased in worth. Collectors of these publications, who were often considered foolish or eccentric by uninformed persons, really had invested most wisely, for even in the hardest of times they could sell parts of their collections at a profit.

If the dime novel had ever been given an intelligent and fair reading test by any of its scorers, it would never have been condemned so. To prove my point I shall finish my argument by telling a true anecdote.

One Sunday morning the great minister, Henry Ward Beecher, was late for service at his Brooklyn church.

"I must apologize for my lateness," he told his congregation, "but I sat up until nearly dawn, reading a dime novel."

In Vol. 5, No. 23, (Whole No. 23) of *Golden Argosy*, under date of Saturday, May 7, 1887, I find the following short article on the editorial page.

THE DIME NOVEL MUST GO

"An article in a late issue of a New York evening paper notes the wane of the dime novel class of literature, wherein the characters are impossible combinations, either of virtues, or of vices and pistol proclivities, and the perusal of which not only weakens

the moral forces, but destroys the appetite for healthier reading matter. The public is certainly to be congratulated on the fact that serious inroads are being made upon the sale of this trash by the growing popularity of such papers as the *Golden Argosy*." Unquote.

Now I wonder if in 1887 Beadle, Tousey or the two Munro's, noticed any decline in the sale of dime novels? I doubt it very much.

Now in the very same issue of *Golden Argosy* in which this little editorial appeared, are installments of "Pirate Island" by Harry Callingham and "The Last War Trail" by Edward S. Ellis. To you old timers who have read these two tales, what do you think of them in comparison to dime novels? Personally, I consider that they contain as much "blood and thunder" as any average dime novel did.

W. M. BURNS.

NEWSY NEWS

by Ralph Cummings

Art Neetz spent a very nice evening at Ray Caldwell's, in Lancaster, Pa., March 15th.

The Roundup now goes to press the 28th of each month instead of the 15th, so as long as you have your ads etc. in before the 28th of each month, you are all O. K.

Your editor is way behind in his correspondence, and with the spring work coming on, and everything, if you don't hear from him right away, don't get impatient, as Bro. Cummings will write you as soon as he can. All orders received will be sent out promptly, as received.

L. D. Webster says he sold Bob Rowan a complete set of *Golden Days*, quite a few years ago, for \$40.00. What a difference today.

Corrections please (with excuses to Charley Chan) *Happy Days* did have an exchange column. Arvid Dahlstedt righted us. See Bob Smeltzers article in Feb. issue, don't worry Bob, we all make mistakes.

Claude Frederick, 65, veteran showman, died a short time ago. He traveled with Barnum & Baileys circus and later became a vaudeville performer, and H. A. Hinton, who wrote stories for *The Boys Friend*, *The Gem*, *The Magnet* and other old English libraries, died New Year's Day, age 57, in an accident,

at the railway station at Weybridge, England. Mr. Hinton was editor of School and Sport in 1921. A fine account of his death, can be found in Bill Gander's Story Paper Collector, for April 1945. No. 22. (See ad in this issue of Roundup).

Anyone got a spare copy of P. T. Barnums "Herald of Freedom?" Can use 2 or 3 copies. What's wanted?

Charlie Duprez, Bellerose, Long Island, N. Y. wants a copy of Work & Win, Fred Fearnot's Twenty-Rounds. Help cheer him up, Pard, with a copy, to remind him of his boyhood days.

A Defense of the Dime Novel, written by a boy of 15, a junior in Lexington high school, and grandson of Bro. Geo. S. Barton, wrote this article in 1942, and I think it is well done.

Am sorry I didn't have any pictures of Gil Patten or of Top Tops in the last number. One thing, I didn't have the room and another, I didn't have a cut of Gil.

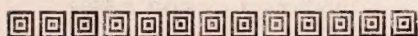
See Memoriam on first page for dear old Uncle Billie and one of his best songs, that he used to love, God bless him, and all our other members who have gone, too.

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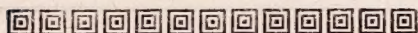


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